

Care in Scotland it's life changing work

Paula Brown, social worker

“Working with people is a real privilege. My social work qualification opened doors to a realm of real diversity.”

Paula works for a local authority. She is a qualified social worker currently on a seconded post looking at co-production work for people living with dementia. Read her story here.

Have you always worked in social services?

I used to work in a drug project attached to a hospital. This role involved counselling people who were trying to manage their drug use, some of them were supported with community detox and part of the role included promoting alternative lifestyle choices. We worked closely with an outdoor organisation and every fortnight we did outdoor pursuits including hillwalking, skiing, mountain biking. This was a great way to improve people's self-esteem and also show the benefits of exercise.

I also worked as a voluntary counsellor with a local alcohol organisation. They delivered certified counselling training. This was largely 121 support for people who were affected by alcohol misuse.





What made you choose the career you have now?

I had practiced as a social worker in a generic adult community care team then as a social worker in a learning disability team. One of my strong values is the importance of a person centred approach when working with people and their carers, family and friends.

In the area I work there is a strong network and partnership working. We have the highest percentage of older people aged over 65 in Scotland. Dementia is an illness of the brain that affects not just older people but is more prevalent in older people. There is still a lot of stigma surrounding dementia and a fear factor that will not go away unless people talk about it. It is likened to how we approached cancer 20 years ago. Unlike treatment for cancer, support for people living with dementia is not free and we need to look at how we can support people better.

I have always enjoyed working with groups and it is a powerful way of addressing issues.

Can you tell us more about your job?

I work directly with people living with dementia, their families, carers and community support providers. Over the period of the Transforming Older People Services Change Fund I have moved into a new role created exclusively to improve daily life for people living with dementia and to facilitate culture change within social work teams and local communities through improved practice and testing different practice models.

I work exclusively with people living with dementia at all stages of their dementia journey. I provide advice and support through individual meetings, as a social work advisor in a dementia advice hub resource.





Can you tell us more about your job?

I am the social work representative in our local Community Mental Health team working closely with post diagnostic support workers to advise on transitions to social work services and personnel, I also work closely with all of the professionals who work in community mental health services. I work daily with people supported by Alzheimer Scotland's five pillars of support and with those people who may benefit from the proposed eight pillars of support.

I am also a practice teacher and strongly believe in supporting and encouraging others to enter a career in social work.

I am also exploring the role of co-production in moving social work practice to a citizen model that will enable people living with dementia to retain and utilise existing skills and abilities and promote capacity building in the community. This is a key role in the development of a Dementia Friendly Community. As part of my role I act as an advisor to social worker colleagues about current issues that affect people with dementia, social work policy that impacts on dementia and developing social media and IT systems to support an engaged, effective work force. Part of my role also entails delivering Dementia Aware training to the community including to other public and emergency services such as local Police Scotland and Fire and Rescue colleagues and schools. I am also a dementia ambassador and having recently completed the dementia champion course, both roles are beneficial to my professional development and for the organisation through my continuous professional development portfolio.





Can you give an example of something that you are working on at the moment?

We support young people to be part of a network committed to developing ideas and initiatives which seek to have people with dementia as active participants not as passive recipients. We aim to build on the existing work of East Dunbartonshire's dementia schools pack for primary school and early secondary pupils. We are looking at introducing a pathway starting with Alzheimer Scotland Dementia Friends to S3 pupils then S4-S6 using the Promoting Excellence "Informed about Dementia" DVD coupled with a locally-focussed dementia awareness presentation.

Working with school pupils presents challenges due to timetables and exams but we have developed good communication with some teaching staff that is very supportive.

Undoubtedly there is an emotional impact for some pupils and we have outlined support at the beginning of every session. As a dementia champion I will be responsible for liaising with the education department as there is discussion about incorporating this training into their curriculum. Some pupils now help run a community café at a local care home once a month.

What qualifications do you need for this job?

I have a postgraduate diploma in social work and am a dementia ambassador. You need to have good communication and networking skills and an enthusiasm and energy and passion to share with others.





Who else is in your team?

I work closely with a colleague from the local advocacy service who is the Network Coordinator and a dementia ambassador. We work with teaching staff, pupils and a local care home manager. The youth volunteering coordinator was vital in this work and being part of the Generations Working Together network too was an advantage. A representative from Scottish Care helped promote the work at the care home managers' forum.

Do you work with other professionals in other sectors eg health, teaching, justice?

I work with professionals across business, health, fire and rescue, police and education, including nurseries. The major focus is on training and awareness raising together with sign posting people so they know where they can access support.

What part of your job motivates you and why?

Social workers are described as 'agents of change', this is a real motivator in my current role. During this difficult time in social care, my job is about promoting a change in culture, building on what we have and supporting others to bring about change.

What are the best bits about your job?

The diversity in my role is a real privilege, working with people and having time to spend with them, finding out what is important.

What are the challenges, good and not so good that you face in your job?

I am working in a unique role. I am looking at community capacity building and asking my colleagues for support whilst they are juggling working with people who require intensive support and intervention. This discrepancy can be a challenge and there are no immediate results, this is part of a longer term culture change, moving away, not replacing supports, in their current form. The Christie Commission report on future of public services outlines that we cannot continue with more of the same. Change needs to be resourced.





In what way is your career in social services rewarding?

Working with people is a real privilege. My social work qualification opened doors to a realm of real diversity. I have worked with people, supporting them to move into their own homes and promote life skills to working with older people in care homes and the community to come to singing groups. There is real potential to improve people's quality of life and that in itself is so rewarding.

Can you explain the skills and qualities you think are needed to do the role you're doing?

You need to be enthusiastic, motivated and believe in what you are doing. I think honesty is another quality, as it is a process, reflecting at every stage and asking what could be done differently is so important too.

Has your job opened up new learning and development for you?

Part of my role has included developing a partnership dementia website:
www.eddn.org.uk
This is something I would not have thought I would have ever done.

How do you see your career progressing?

I have been very fortunate in my seconded role and hope that the local authority embeds this way of working into practice and I continue in my role as coordinator.

I would like to develop an infrastructure for sustaining co-production and believe a time banking model would be an appropriate tool.

What would you say to someone thinking about a career in social services?

Do it!
Working in social care is a real challenge and privilege. The possibilities are endless and there is always the opportunity to change.





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